CREVICE GARDEN Display

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Plus! Crevice Garden Book Review

The Crevice Garden: How to Make the Perfect Home for Plants from Rocky Places

Book by Kenton Seth and Paul Spriggs

The Crevice Garden: How to Make the Perfect Home for Plants from Rocky Places by Kenton Seth and Paul Spriggs is a comprehensive guide to building and planting crevice gardens, which mimic natural rocky environments for alpine and drought-tolerant plants. The book covers design, construction (using vertical stones to create deep, cool pockets), and planting, featuring over 250 plant recommendations, case studies, and ecological benefits like creating wildlife habitats and permeable walls. It's praised for its detailed instructions, excellent photography, and suitability for both beginners and experts.

Key aspects of the book

- **What it is:**

A guide to creating rock gardens that replicate harsh, rocky environments like mountaintops and deserts.

- **How it works:**

It explains how to build structures with vertically placed stones to create deep, cool, gravelly pockets for roots, mimicking natural seeps and cracks.

- **Content:**

Includes sections on design, construction, and planting, with an A-Z guide of 250 suitable plants (alpines, succulents, etc.).

- **Benefits:**

Highlights ecological advantages, such as creating wildlife habitats and plant-friendly alternatives to solid retaining walls.

- **Authors:**

Kenton Seth (Colorado) and Paul Spriggs (British Columbia) are experts in the field, with Seth also providing illustrations.

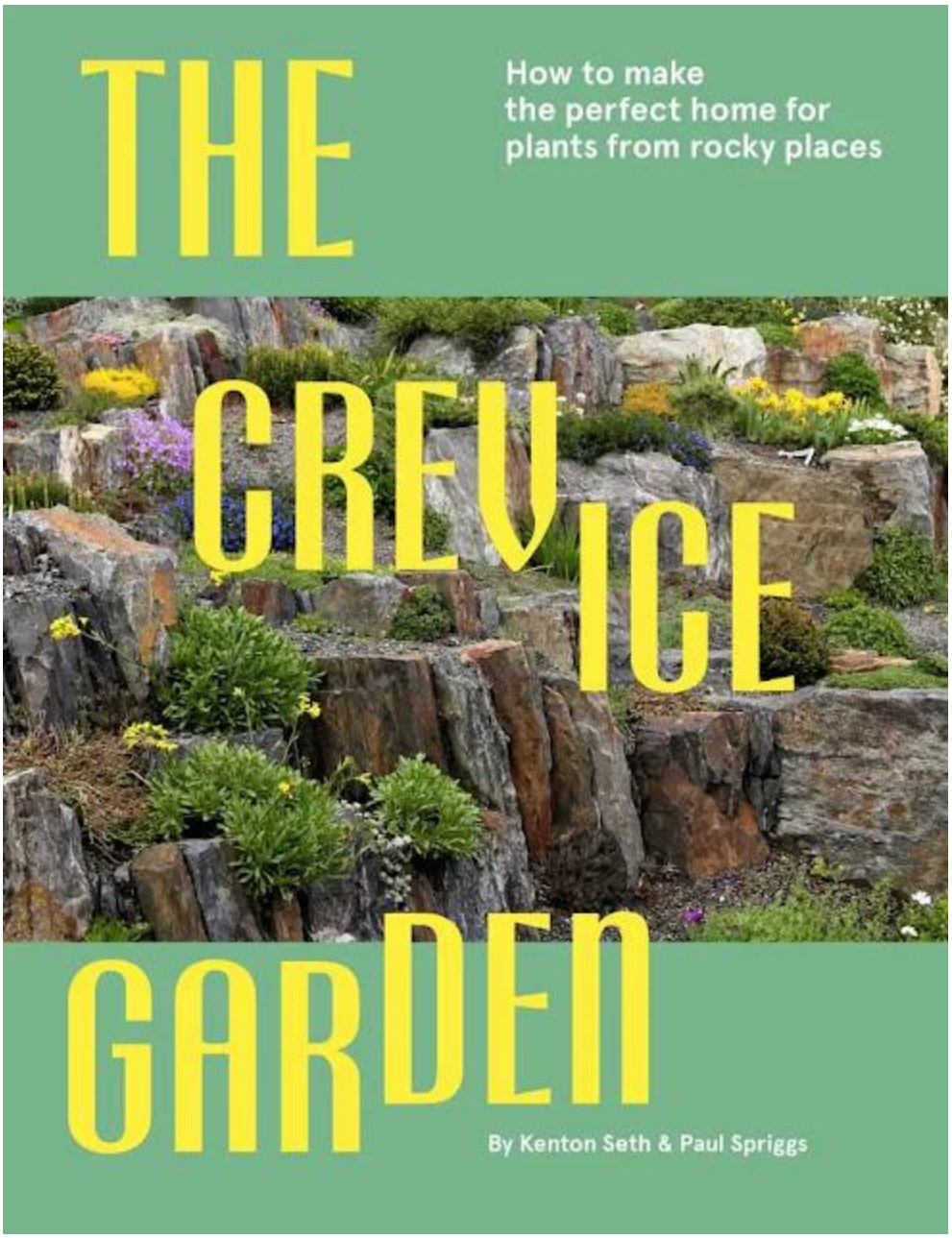
- **Format:**

A hardcover book with full-color photos, diagrams, and case studies, published in 2022.

Monday, September 12, 2022

The Crevice Garden, a book review

The full name of the book is *The Crevice Garden: How to make the perfect home for plants from rocky places* and it was written by Paul Spriggs and Kenton Seth. I received a copy of the book back in April (thank you Filbert Press!). That means I've been picking up and reading bits of the book for almost five months now, what a luxurious way to read a book.



I suppose I should fess up right away that this is not going to be an normal book review, nor an impartial one. Not when I've been conversing with Kenton Seth for going on seven years. I first "met" him when he granted me a phone interview for a story I was writing for the Oregon Association of Nurseries on crevice gardens—Thriving between the cracks. I've been a fangirl of Kenton's and the crevice garden since then.

But here's the thing. I don't much care for the plants people create crevice gardens to grow. Fussy little flowering things. I do like the big buns, the cushion plants. Big mounds of interesting—many times spiky—foliage, yes please! I confessed this shocking realization to

Kenton when he was in town (we finally got to meet in person!) to build a crevice garden at Cistus Nursery, on the private Rancho Cistus grounds (home to Sean Hogan and Preston Pew). He didn't seem to upset by my admission, which was pretty in character. Even though he's built dozens (hundreds?) of crevice gardens and is arguably the US authority on them, he's not a stickler for what exactly defines a "proper" crevice garden. Got rocks? Great. Want to use urbanite (broken pieces of unwanted concrete) instead? No problem. Want to plant in the cracks between boulders rather than flat rocks. Yep, that works.

A different kind of crevice garden, at Rare Plant Research in Oregon City

How can you not be charmed by someone who is so happy to see their craft interpreted in a way that works for the gardener, the creator of the space, rather than adhering to a set of RULES? The good news is, that feeling of joy at seeing a garden be what it's builder/owner wants it to be comes through loud and clear in the book. Kenton and Paul start the book explaining what exactly a crevice garden is, talk about natural rock gardens, and then delve into

the history of what a crevice garden is and where it came from (very interesting stuff for anyone who enjoys learning about gardens and gardening styles).

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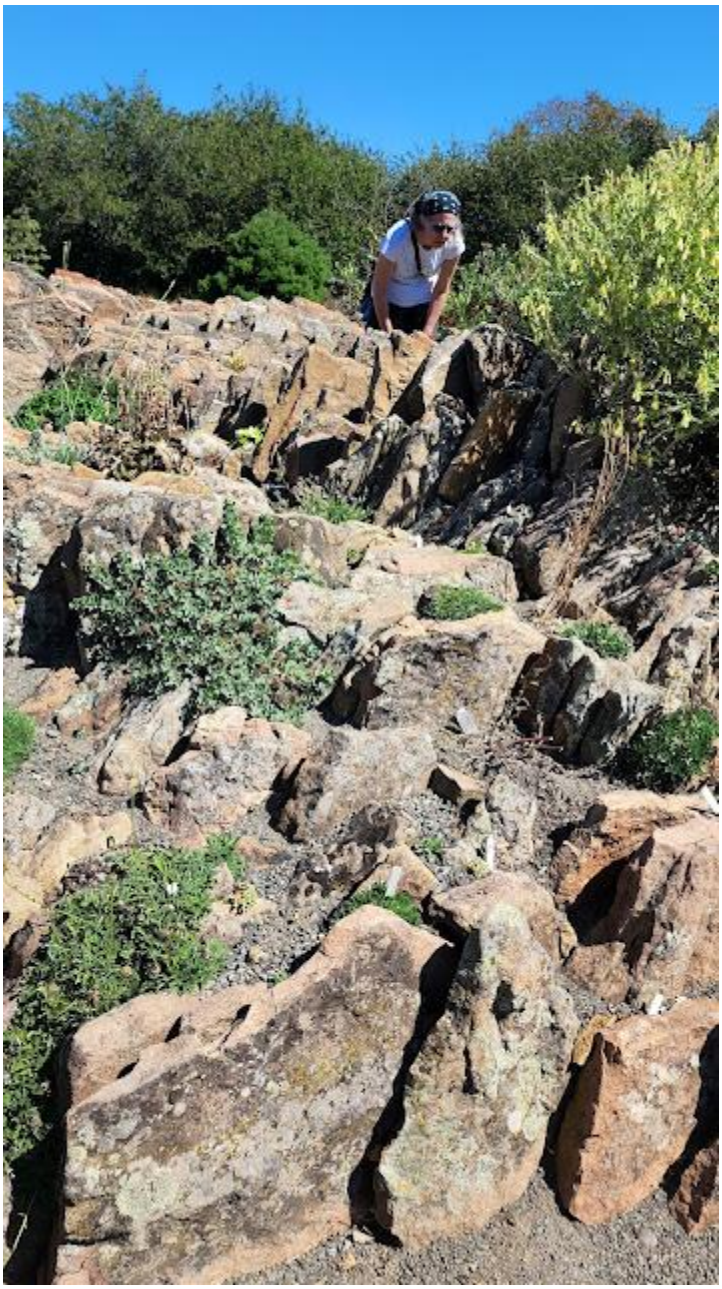
Table of contents, screenshot from [Filbert Press website]

The chapter titled "How a Crevice Works" was a fascinating read for learning how rock in a garden effects the surrounding plants; rock mulch helps to reduce water loss through evaporation, rocks release heat at night and dark colored rocks absorb even more heat than light colored ones (and on and on). From here you're off to learning about what is involved in building a crevice garden—which can truly be as big, or as little, as you've got the space for.

These next four photos were taken by Scott Meyer at Far Reaches Farm in Port Townsend when he visited last month. Kenton, Paul, and an assorted cast of their associates, built an extensive network of crevice gardens there, which I have not had the pleasure of visiting in person. Sections of these rocky gardens have been planted, others are so new they're still plantless.

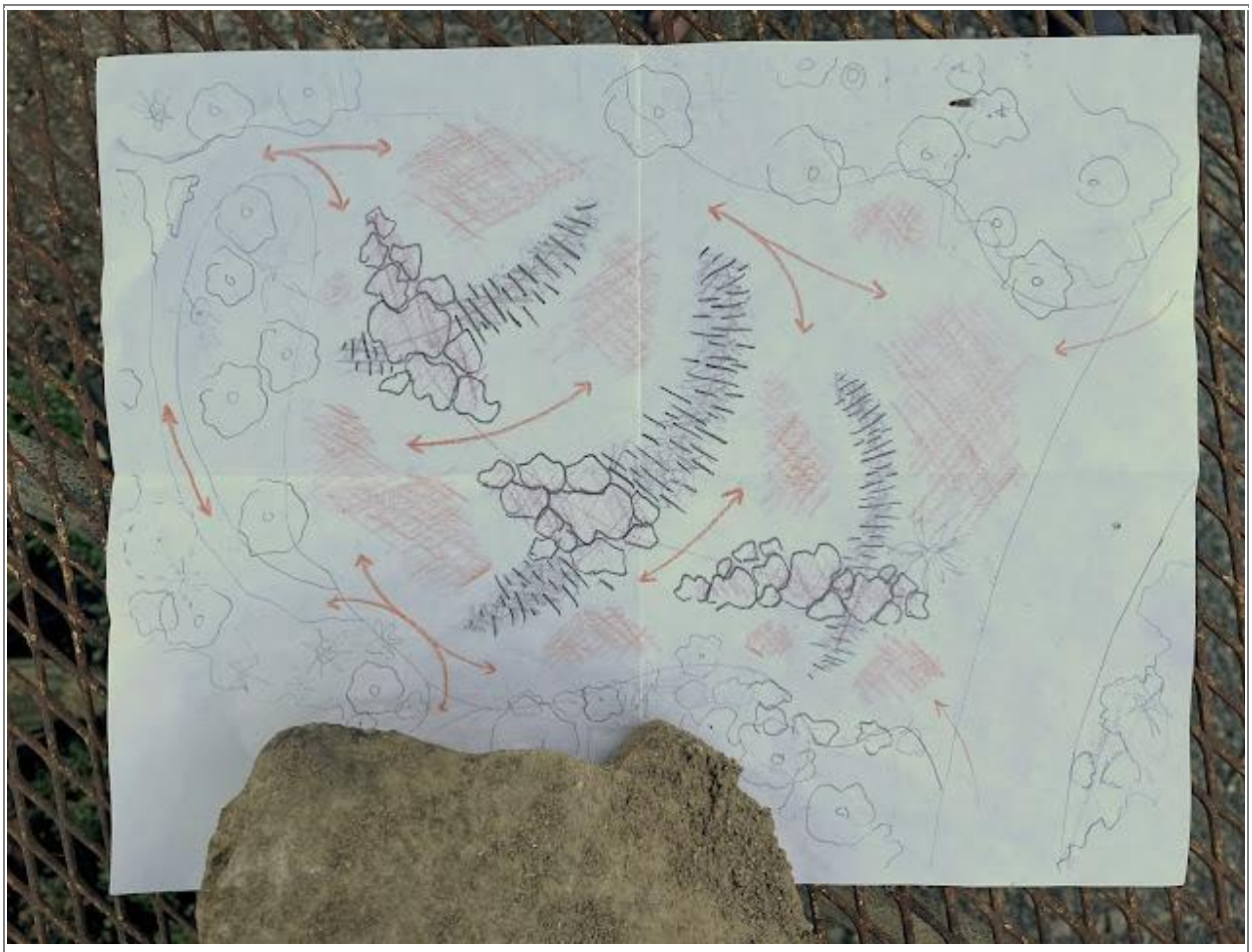


Having been a "student" of Kenton's for several years now there are two nuggets of crevice garden knowledge that are wedged firmly in my mind, points that are indeed addressed in the book. The first is the idea that plants growing in crevices can be compared to a weed growing in the cracks of your sidewalk. You're maybe struggling to grow plants just inches away in your garden, yet here is this thing thriving in a sidewalk crack. This is why crevice gardens are successful. Moisture is funneled down into that crack, and the plants roots grown down, down, down where they have access to moisture not available on the surface.

The second is the idea that a crevice garden—or any rock garden planting of some height—naturally creates varied topography that introduces distinct microclimates. Shady spots, sheltered spots, areas with reflected heat, areas with increased drainage. These are microclimates that a gardener can use to grow a wider range of plants, and who doesn't want that!?

So about that crevice garden at Cistus. I took a couple photos last June, during the unveiling at a fundraiser for the Portland Botanical Gardens...

Left to right: Saxon Holt, Kenton Seth, Jeremy Schmidt—at Cistus Nursery



A sketch of the garden, I believe drawn by Sean Hogan and refined by Jeremy Schmidt

But it was a busy night with lots of people mingling about. I decided to make a trip out on a quieter day last month, to snap a few photos of the magic already happening in this very newly built (and not quite complete) feature. It's worth noting a bit of man-made shade has been created for these poor plants which are enduring summer-time planting with extreme heat and no rain. Of course Sean has chosen to plant up some of the crevices with exactly the type of plants I would have planted...

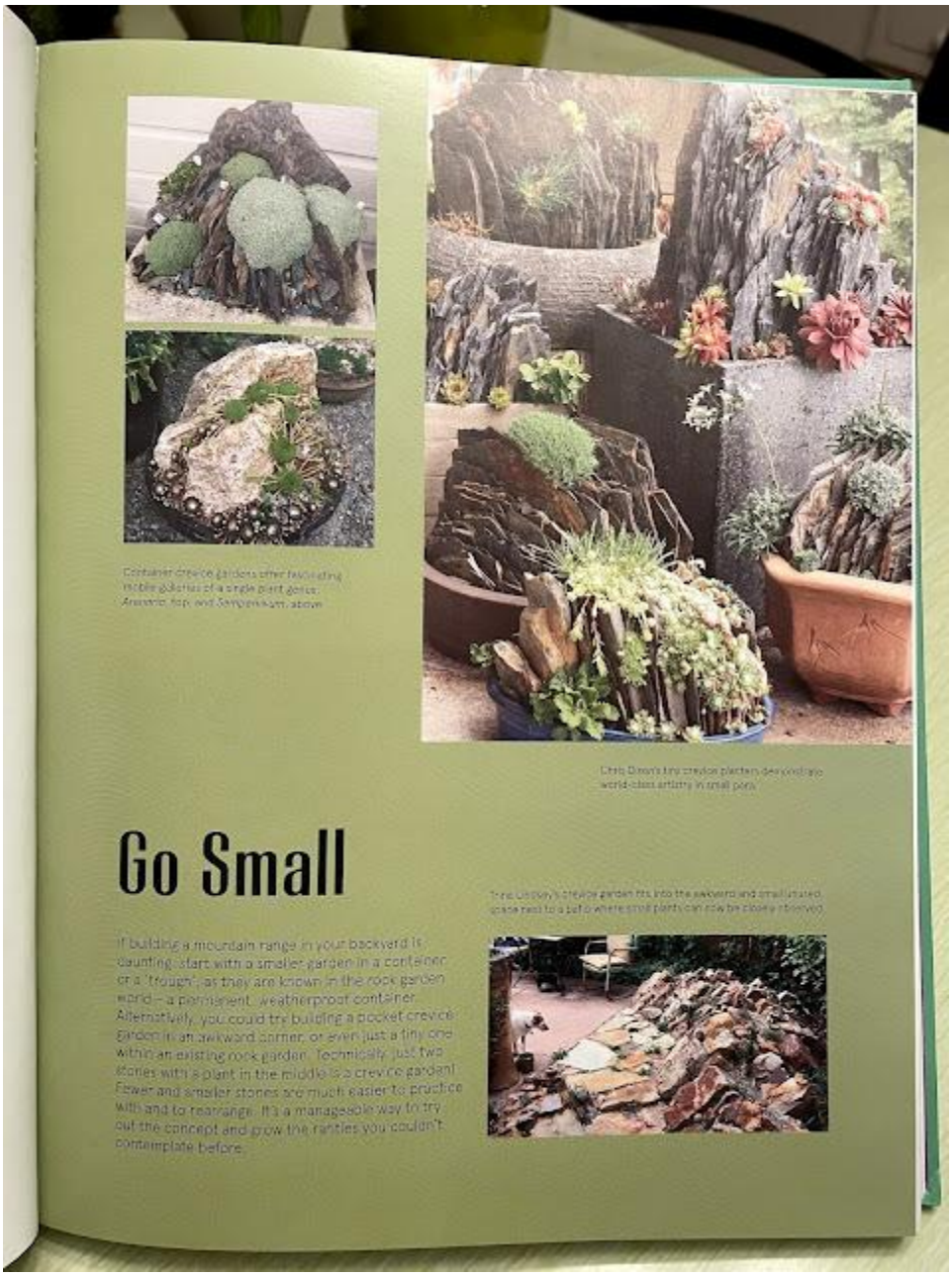
I look forward to watching this Rancho Cistus crevice garden grown and develop over time.

Finally, I was chatting with a few gardening friends last weekend, one of which is building a small—highly personalized—crevice garden in her front garden, and a two others who seemed to revel in the fact they didn't have, nor were they planning, a "trendy" crevice garden. I think it's exactly that idea, that a crevice garden has to be something precious, in all caps and quotes a "CREVICE GARDEN" that this book helps to rally against. Sure it gives you the basics, the

history, the how to... but it celebrates individuality and creativity while illustrating basic gardening fundamentals. I guess what I am trying to say is that you don't have to have any interest in building a huge crevice garden to enjoy and learn from this book. Two last images, photos I took of page layouts in the book. First up crevice inspiration found out in the world...

Inspiration also comes from roof tiles, rock walls and sidewalk cracks.
51
This page, top to bottom: Sempervivum
arachnoideum, Asplenium trichomanes, and
Campanula portenschlagiana.

And secondly, proof you can still enjoy a crevice garden even in tiny spaces...



I'll end this post with a quote from Beverley Nichols, and his book *Garden Open Today* a quote which appears in *The Crevice Garden*. Had I come across this on my own I would have tried to included it in the pages of *Fearless Gardening*, but it was even more wonderful to find it here: "If ever there was a place where rules were made to be broken, it is in the garden."

Buy and read *The Crevice Garden: How to make the perfect home for plants from rocky places*, you will not be disappointed! Oh and be sure to follow Kenton's blog I Need A Cup of Tea.

— — —

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Labels: books, crevice gardens, nurseries, rambling thoughts

16 comments:

1.

Linda Brazill September 12, 2022

I think I read an Irish gardener reviewing this book. And now you. That means it's a must have.

Reply

Replies

1.

danger garden September 13, 2022

It really is!

Reply

2.

Kris Peterson September 12, 2022

I'm intrigued but simultaneously intimidated by crevice gardens, or more specifically by the work necessary to move around rock pieces as large as those in most crevice gardens I've seen. That said, I'm convinced of the value of adding rock in gardens, especially succulent gardens, which can never have enough rock as far as I'm concerned. I've added rock to most of my succulent beds but they all could use more and larger rocks. Having spent hours just yesterday pulling spotted spurge, a Euphorbia weed, from my garden without making a dent in it, I also appreciate how well weeds grow between and around my flagstones, generally out-competing the creeping thyme I planted there - I'm thinking of pulling up the flagstones the next time I plant thyme just so I can settle its roots in around the stone edges before the weeds take over.

Reply

Replies

1.

danger garden September 13, 2022

The size of many of the rocks used in large crevice gardens is definitely intimidating. Not only because of the strength needed to move them into place, but one wrong move and an injury could easily occur. Thank good ness for small crevice garden alternatives!

Reply

3.

AnonymousSeptember 13, 2022

I've been fascinated by crevice gardening so if ever I were to start over... but then the "Go Small" idea is just the thing for me. I love miniatures anyway, so I'm going to make a note to self, not to get too caught up in routine garden activities and get it done.
chavli

Reply

Replies

1.

danger garden September 13, 2022

Get it done! And then send me photos ;)

Reply

4.

ElaineSeptember 14, 2022

Have been looking forward to this book since Kenton spoke at our local Rock Garden Society. I have two neighbours with incredible crevice gardens. It's not only the way the plants grow into the rocks that is cool but the rocks themselves add a huge amount of textural interest. Are you considering a tiny crevice garden container? Succulents and spikey would fit nicely.

Reply

Replies

1.

danger garden September 14, 2022

Succulent and spiky are definitely my favorite crevice garden material, so if I do that is what will be planted. That said, I cannot come up with a good place for a crevice garden here, maybe if/when we move...

Reply

5.

Kenton J. Seth September 14, 2022

Thanks for the words, Amiga! I am so totally with you... That Crevice Gardens are not the be-all and end-all (and oddly I find myself trying to delicately share that nuanced message lately: CGs have especially become conflated with xeric gardening here...) and that they are not a silver bullet, nor are they for everyone or every space. A great (underused?) option, but not a zenith. I think they are more of a sort of Swiss Army Knife that can take many forms, and which can blur/hybridize into other planting systems... At the moment I am playing with the mix of Meadow/forb/grass garden and Crevice... because that happens all the time in nature here on the West Slope of the rockies and the desert, but it's always been problematic to try in the garden. I also think they could be leveraged more in wildlife gardening for habitat for critters that want rock shelter, warmth, etc.

Can I confess here, in your comments, Loree, that I personally actually don't care for the super-liner highly-organized thin-stones-upright old-school type of crevice garden? That may be the most traditional type... Yah, seriously, not my own cuppa... but I am stoked for everyone/anyone with whom it resonates and makes joy.

A small tome could be written just on strategies/challenges to moving rock... overcoming obstacles or knowing when to throw in the towel or NOT have a crevice garden- because that's real, too! To truly define a thing means defining it's limits, edges, and places it doesn't work!

I suspect that I'm not unreasonable in hoping folks will carry Crevice gardening into places it's historically been far from- to "de-colonialize" it, even- to make it truly blue collar, to "take it to the streets," maybe... and be available to everyone.

I think that if there is a family tree of current garden thought, my hope is that our book is a twig on the branch of the thesis of Fearless Gardening- to make your garden your own...

Reply

Replies

1.

danger garden September 16, 2022

Crevice garden as Swiss army knife! And yes, my blog is a safe place for that confession—no judgement here. As for the tree, your book is a branch, a nice big one that divides many times and bears fruit.

Reply

6.

AnonymousSeptember 15, 2022

Well, not exactly crevice gardening in the narrow sense, but I am trying to place an overabundance of smaller basalt rocks tightly around the plants I want to grow in an attempt to create a rock garden that minimizes space for weeds. We'll see how it works. I am dreading all of the Douglas-fir needles that will get caught up in it, but maybe the leaf blower will take care of it. I like basalt because we can get it from a quarry nearby, it's cheap, and they are mostly a size that I can handle. I would love to do what Cistus and Far Reaches have done, but I don't have the skill set and strength to handle that, or the $ for someone else to do it for me. In the end, it's been a lot of fun.

I could definitely see myself doing a little mini one if I ever get around to making a trough.

If only Far Reaches would open to the public for visits. I want to see their new crevice gardens! Love the style of the one at Cistus, especially that one view of the ridge in front of the plastic tent. What they've done reminds me so much of the desert southwest where I spent some time growing up. Really cool to see it echoed up here.

Reply

Replies

1.

JerrySeptember 15, 2022

And, if only I would learn to log my comments correctly! Someday I'll do it right.

2.

danger garden September 16, 2022

Coming on the heals of a comment that did include your name, and given you referenced Dour Fir needles (and the Desert Southwest), I kind of thought it might be you. I didn't realize FRF was still closed for in person shopping! Yikes. I assume staffing issues rather than COVID?

3.

AnonymousSeptember 17, 2022

Yes, staffing issues. But as they point out, their mail order is still operating.

Reply

7.

David C. October 23, 2022

As you might guess, I'm not very into the whole fussy perennial-forb look in crevice gardens or any other gardens. Here in the desert, bold is the way to go, like what Sean is doing with his planting in Kenton's / Paul's construction. Or the subtropical crevice garden Pam showed in her ATX. Not the "crazy quilts of (gray and brown twigs)" approach so common in Denver - evergreens, spikes rule. This book seems like a must have, and so it is on my list.

And thanks for the Rare Plant Research round boulder crevice, also viable and reminding me of our wild, granite boulder crevice gardens in the wild foothills.

Reply

Replies

1.

danger garden October 23, 2022

I visited that garden with Pam (my post here http://www.thedangergarden.com/2021/12/the-crevice-gardenand-moreat-colesons.html) and it was such an eye-opener as far as the possibilities. You will enjoy this book, I am sure.

Reply

Thank you for taking the time to comment. Comment moderation is on (because you know: spam), I will approve and post your comment as soon as possible!

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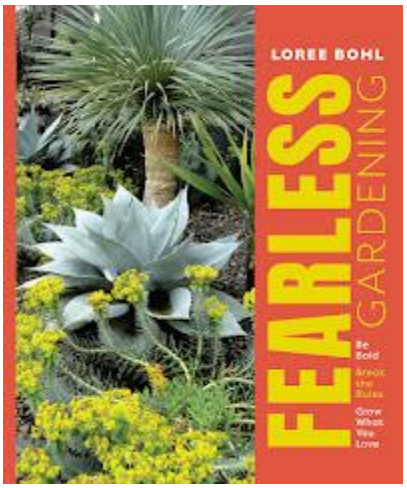

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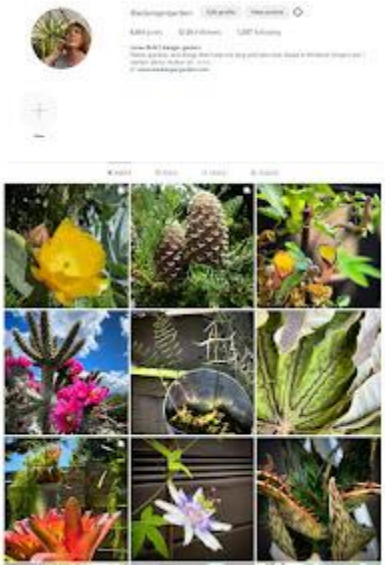
Instagram, instant plant and garden porn! See what I'm up to over there...



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